

## “Selfies”: Depicting the Self, 1500 to the Present Day

Yale College Summer Session  
HSAR S284  
Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-4:15  
Session A (June 7 - July 9)

Instructor: Judith Stapleton  
Office Hours: Wednesday 10-11:30  
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\*Syllabus subject to change



### Course Description:

What does it mean to picture the self? This course will look at the long history of artistic representations of the self in western art before and after photography. We'll explore the selfie as a uniquely modern form of self-expression, economized self-promotion, and political subversion at the same time that we consider its roots in the broader history of self-portraiture in the arts. Spanning a period bracketed by contemporary selfies on one hand and Albrecht Dürer's 1500 self-portrait on the other, we'll consider how artists have historically framed and pictured the self in painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts. This course will draw on objects from the Yale University Art Gallery and the Yale Center for British Art as well as from major art collections worldwide. At the same time, we'll explore self-representation on social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. In examining depictions of the self across such varied media, we'll determine how notions of self-

presentation in the arts intersect with questions of individualism, identity, commodity culture, and self-promotion from 1500 to today.

## **Course Expectations:**

### Attendance

Because this is an accelerated course, unexcused absences are not permitted.

### Readings:

All readings will be available as PDFs on Canvas.

### Accommodation:

If you are in need of accommodation or special assistance, please contact the Student Accessibility Services. Accommodations are kept confidential.

### Academic Integrity

Any forms of plagiarism will be strictly penalized. All information taken from external sources must be properly cited according to MLA or Chicago guidelines. If you have questions on how to properly cite information or about plagiarism in general, please see the Center for Teaching and Learning's website [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism](#), particularly the section "Warning: When You Must Cite." All students will take the Poorvu Center's Plagiarism Quiz before submitting their first paper.

Yale takes all instances of academic dishonesty seriously. Penalties can include suspension from the university or lowered or failing grades. Please review [Yale's Statement on Academic Integrity](#).

### Grading:

	% of Final Grade
Attendance and Participation	20%
Reading Responses	15%
Flash Presentation: Selfies	5%
Paper 1 (Visual Analysis)	20%
Paper 2 (Research Paper)	40%

### Late Assignments:

Late assignments will result in a reduction of one half of a letter grade (A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc) for each day the assignment is late.

Extensions must be approved by me in advance of the due-date. I understand life is unpredictable, especially at the present moment. In the case of an emergency, I will do my best to accommodate for your situation, but I cannot be of assistance unless I am aware of your situation. Please stay in contact.

## Remote Teaching

- All course sections will take place on synchronously zoom. Our goal will be to reproduce the best elements of live, in-person teaching. To that end, please honor the following zoom etiquette.
- Treat your zoom class-time as if it were an in-person meeting. Come prepared to engage in active discussion. Avoid distraction by closing all windows, programs, and message notifications not being used for class.
- Please make a good-faith effort to keep your camera on during class. Participation and class engagement drops exponentially when cameras are turned off. If you anticipate technical difficulties, please let me know in advance of class so that I know to expect issues.
- In order to promote a safe environment for all intellectual discussion and to protect the privacy of your fellow students do not photograph or record any part of class meetings.

## Participation:

Participation will account for 20% of your final grade. To receive full marks for participation, students must demonstrate that they have done the readings and must engage in fruitful, generative discussion over the course of each class. If a student does not participate in class, either by speaking or using the chat feature to comment on salient points, he or she cannot earn credit for that day's participation. Learning to participate in and shape an active discussion is one of the key aims of this course.

## Reading Responses: (1-2 paragraphs, 15% of grade):

Each student is expected to do the readings in advance of lecture. For each module, you will submit a short response to one of the assigned readings on Canvas. Your response should address any aspect of the reading you felt was compelling or problematic. Responses should be submitted by midnight before class.

## Flash Presentation (5 minutes, 10% of your grade):

Due Tuesday, June 15th

Find a selfie online or through social media which you think is intriguing or offers insight into questions of identity, self-expression, or self-marketing. In five minutes, analyze the selfie for your classmates, pointing out key features and explaining their significance. This presentation is intentionally concise, so keep your analysis focused and to-the-point.

## Writing Assignments:

### **Visual Analysis (2-3 pages, 20% of grade):**

Due Friday, June 25<sup>th</sup>

Find a self-portrait dated from 1500 to 1970 that you wish to analyze. This self-portrait will be the basis of your final paper. It can be of any individual, but makes sure the content is interesting enough to merit a 2-to-3-page visual

analysis of the image. You should present and analyze the formal construction of the image. Consider line, color, shape, use of space, composition, form, media, visual rhyming, texture, materiality, symmetry or balance, dynamic force, etc. Although your paper should consider iconography, this should not be the only element of your analysis. This assignment is geared towards sharpening your observational and analytical skills. Make sure to have sent me your chosen image by June 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Final Paper (8 pages, 40 % of grade):**

Due: Friday, July 9<sup>th</sup>

Choose a theme that has emerged over this course. Examples may include narcissism, gender, race, sexuality, beauty, ugliness, activism, consumerism, nudity, truth, deception, violence, kitsch, or performance. Other themes are welcome as long as the topic has been approved by me. The final assignment will ask you to craft a thesis-driven account of how this theme is explored in a particular set of self-portraits. Your paper should have a strong thesis statement that showcases a nuanced and considered stance. Your paper can either be fully historical or weave together contemporary and historical examples of self-portraiture.

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**Schedule:**

**Week 1:**

**1. Selfies and Self-Portraiture: An Introduction**

Tuesday, June 8<sup>th</sup>

[authorship](#) | [agency](#) | [audience](#) | [self-portraiture: critical terms and contexts](#)

Readings:

Kris Belden-Adam, "Locating the Selfie within Photography's History—and Beyond" in *Exploring the Selfie: Historical, Theoretical, and Analytical Approaches to Digital Self-Photography*, edited by Julia Eckel, Jens Ruchatz, and Sabine Wirth. Springer International Publishing: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 83-94.

Shearer West, "Self-Portraiture" in *Portraiture*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 163-186.

Didier Maleuvre, "Rembrandt, or the portrait as encounter" in *Imaging Identity: Media, Memory and Portraiture in the Digital Age*, edited by Melinda Hinkson. Acton, Australia: Australia National University Press, 2016, pp. 15-36. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1rrd7ms.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1rrd7ms.7).

Class Activity:

Jamboard Discussion: "Functions and Possibilities of Self-Portraiture"

## 2. The Narcissus Question

Thursday, June 10<sup>th</sup>

Narcissus stories: from Ovid to Freud | self-expression | self-promotion | the self in the mirror

### Readings:

Greg Goldberg, "Through the Looking Glass: The Queer Narcissism of Selfies," *Social Media + Society*, January - March 2017, pp. 1-11. DOI: 10.1177/2056305117698494.

Michael Wilson, "Rebels and Martyrs" pp 7-28 and the one-page blurbs:

- "Romantic Hero" 45
- "Romantic Myths" 71
- "Bohemia" 89
- "The Dandy and the Flâneur" 119
- "Priest, Seer, Martyr, Christ" 139
- "Creativity and Sexuality" 163

in *Rebels and Martyrs: The Image of the Artist in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by, Alexander Sturgis, Rupert Christiansen, Lois Oliver and Michael Wilson. London: National Gallery Company [27 pages total]

### Optional Reading:

Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the 'I' as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," in *Jacques Lacan: Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 75-81.

### Class Presentations:

#### **Student Flash Presentations: Selfies**

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### Week 2:

## 3. Photography and the Indexical Self

Tuesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>

photographic identities | indexicality | fantasy | truth

### Readings:

Roland Barthes, selections from *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, pp. 3-22.

Jan von Brevern, "Resemblance After Photography" in *Representations*, vol. 123, no. 1, 2013, pp. 1-22. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2013.123.1.1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rep.2013.123.1.1).

### Class Activity:

## Techniques of Visual Analysis

### 4. Self-Portrait as a (Female) Artist

Thursday, June 17<sup>th</sup>

the gaze | tradition | gender | sexuality

#### Readings:

Laura Pérez, "Decolonizing Self-Portraits of Frida Kahlo, Ana Mendieta, and Yreina D. Cervéantez," in *Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019.

Amelia Jones, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment." *Signs*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2002, pp. 947–978. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339641](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339641).

#### Class Activity:

Discussion of final paper assignment

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### Week 3:

### 5. Queer Visibilities

Tuesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>

femininities | masculinities | queer visibilities

#### Readings:

Welby-Everard, Miranda. "Imaging the Actor: The Theatre of Claude Cahun." *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1–24. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3600491](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3600491).

Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. New York; Trumansburg, 1984. pp. 53-59.

Richard Meyer, "Barring Desire: Robert Mapplethorpe and the Discipline of Photography," *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art*, New York: Oxford Press, 2002, 158-223, 320-336.

#### Additional Readings:

iO Tillet Wright, *Self-Evident Truths: 10,000 Portraits of Queer America*. Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2020.

### 6. Race and Ecologies of Resistance

Thursday, June 24<sup>th</sup>

resistance | protest | glory | manifesto

Willis, Deborah. "Sources of Self-Regard: Self-Portraits from Black Photographers Reflecting on America." [interactive article] *Surfacing: The New York Times*, June 19 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/19/arts/black-photographers-self-portraits.html>

bell hooks, "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life," in *Art on My Mind*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995, pp. 54-64.

Robert R. Shane, "I longed to cherish mirrored reflections": Mirroring and Black Female Subjectivity in Carrie Mae Weems's Art against Shame," *Hypatia*, 33: 500-520. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12391>

Additional Reading:

James Smalls, "African-American Self-Portraiture: Repair, Reclamation, Redemption," *Third Text*, 15:54, 99. 47-62, DOI: 10.1080/09528820108576899

Friday June 25th:

**Visual Analysis Due**

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Week 4:

**7. Staging the Self: Historicism, Costume, and Theatricality**

Tuesday, June 29th

performance | display | the mask | theatricality and identity |  
#tussenkunstenquarantaine

Interactive Assignment:

Read Goldstein, Caroline. "See 15 Ways Bored People Around the World Have Used Household Objects to Recreate Famous Paintings From Art History" *ArtNet*, April 2, 2020. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/instagram-recreate-famous-artworks-1819776>

Browse these hashtags on social media: #tussenkunstenquarantaine or the #gettymuseumchallenge. Find a self-portrait that has been restaged. Consider how the recreation sheds new light on the original self-portrait and makes you notice new or exciting things. Email me with your selection by midnight on Wednesday.

Readings:

Valérie Morisson, "Yinka Shonibare, MBE and Sartorial Parody: Costuming as Subversive Practice," *Études britanniques contemporaines*. 51, 2016, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.3401>

*Staging the Self: Self-Portrait Photography 1840s-1980s*, edited by James Lingwood. London: National Portrait Gallery; Plymouth: Plymouth Arts Center, 1986.

## 8. **On Staring: Beyond a Rhetoric of Beauty**

Thursday, July 1

beauty's others | illness | stigma | the stare | disability | fetish

### Readings:

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Seeing the Disabled: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography," edited by Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky. *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press, 2001, pp. 335-74.

Stefanie Snider. "On the Limitations of the Rhetoric of Beauty: Embracing Ugliness in Contemporary Fat Visual Representations" in *On the Politics of Ugliness*, edited by Sara Rodrigues and Ela Przybylo. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Tamar Tembeck, "Selfies of Ill Health: Online Autopathographic Photography and the Dramaturgy of the Everyday," *Social Media + Society*, 1-11, March 30 2016, Sage Journals. DOI: 10.1177/2056305116641343

### Additional Readings:

Riva Lehrer, "Presence as Absence: The Paradox of Disability in Portraiture," in *Contemporary Art and Disability Studies*, edited by Alice Wexler and John Derby. New York and London: Routledge, 2020. pp. 185-202

Week 5:

## 9. **Censorship, Nudity, and Self-Portraiture Today**

Tuesday, July 6<sup>th</sup>

Naked or nude? | taboos | the forbidden | the Kardashians |

### Readings:

Julia Jacobs, "Will Instagram Ever 'Free the Nipple'?" *The New York Times*, Nov. 22 2019.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/22/arts/design/instagram-free-the-nipple.html>

Kim Kardashian, *Selfish*. New York: Universe, 2015. Pages TK.

## 10. **Final Paper Presentations**

Thursday, July 8<sup>th</sup>